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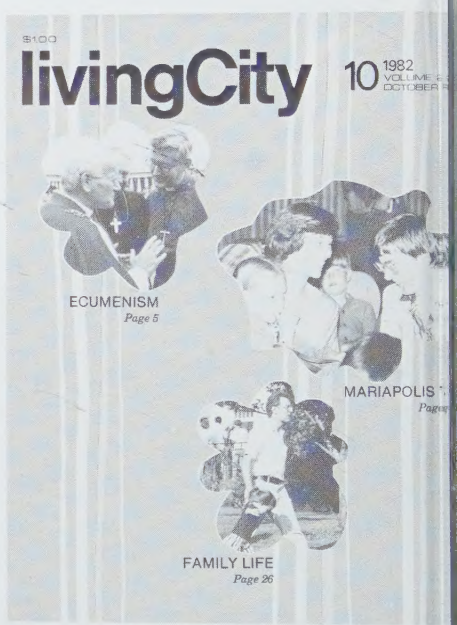

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by CHIARA LUBICH

SIDE BY SIDE for the good of humanity

Recent issues of Living City have covered the trip made by Chiara Lubich, foundress and president of the Focolare Movement, to Asia and Australia. While in Tokyo, she addressed 10,000 members of the lay Buddhist movement, the Rissho Kosei-kai. We are publishing her talk in its entirety.

My dear Brothers and Sisters in God, our meeting today is not an isolated event. A few years ago, the Providence of God drew the Focolare Movement close to the Rissho Kosei-kai Movement to which you belong. In 1979, I had the great joy of meeting your president, Nikkyo Niwano in Rome and now, of meeting him here once again.

Groups of your Movement have visited some of our Focolare Centers in Italy and in the Philippines, for example, and some of our members have participated in the conferences for peace which are close to your hearts as they are to our own.

And finally, not long ago, I was able to learn more about you and your Movement through a documentary film which made a strong and beautiful impression on me. What I received from the film was a still deeper conviction that God loves you.

Today I have the honor of presenting to you my own spiritual experience. Accept it as a gift of love from one of your sisters.

As you certainly know, I am a Christian and I belong to the Catholic Church. The Church which has been living for twenty centuries in the world has, as her principal task, to lead people to sanctity. She does this by means of grace, the grace which Jesus has brought on earth which confers on men and women the dignity of children of God.

While doing this, the Church, following her founder, Jesus, does not forget our earthly needs and works incessantly to build peace, to help the needy, educate the ignorant, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, soothe all suffering — with a great number of initiatives suggested by her love for mankind. Only God can measure that which the Church has given to the world in these centuries. The Church is one, holy and universal, and was founded on the Apostles chosen by Jesus.

But if the Church is one and holy, her members are men and women living in the midst of the world and they may be subject to bad influences which humanity suffers from time to time, or be shaken by the storms raging across it. Thus it can happen that Christians become lukewarm, and the love that Christ himself has brought down from heaven and which should be their characteristic feature, may diminish in their hearts.

Thus it is that the Spirit of God intervenes in the Church, also in ways which are out of the ordinary, and sends for her particular gifts which act as a spiritual tonic.

Those who receive these graces unite then in spiritual movements which strengthen the Christian community. And just as in spring the tender buds opening on the most fragile branches reveal the life flowing throughout the trunk to all parts of the tree, so too these gifts, enriching the Church all over the world, with new life, manifest, by their mere existence, its vitality.

My own experience, which goes hand-in-hand with that of the Focolare Movement, is linked with one of these springtimes of the Church of Christ today.

Let's take a step backwards. It is the year 1943. I am in a little city in northern Italy. The Second World War is raging, destroying everything: nothing is left untouched. I am twenty-three years old. With some friends of mine, I understand that everything which one most loves in the world may vanish.

I, for example, had made my studies the center of my life, but the war keeps me from continuing them. One of my friends set her heart on a future family, but her fiance does not return from the war.

"...the Spirit of God intervenes in the Church also in ways which are out of the ordinary and sends for her particular gifts which act as a spiritual tonic."

Another wished to have her home beautifully done, but the bombs damage it.

In my heart, I ask myself if there is any ideal that is worth living for, that no bomb can destroy. I understand the answer from within: Yes, there is such an ideal. It is God.

I decide therefore to make God the ideal of my life, and I share this decision with my friends.

During these days, a priest asks me to give God some moments of my day for his ministry. With the generosity of youth, I answer: "Even the whole day!" Struck by this reply, he asks me to kneel down, gives me his blessing and says, "God loves you immensely."

These words, said by someone to whom God had given spiritual authority over others, make a deep impression on me. That which as a Christian I had learned ever since I was a child, that is, that God is Love, that he knows me and, as Jesus says, counts even the hairs on my head, enters my mind and even more so my heart, in a very new way, like a flash of lightning: God loves me! God is Love!

My life begins to change. The circumstances and events around me, the encounters, sufferings and joys, are no longer merely chance events. Behind everything there is Someone who guides all things for my good because he loves me. And what is true for me is true for everyone.

How different my life becomes! Before I was like an orphan, alone in the world! Now I have re-discovered my Father who watches over me. And to be loved is happiness.

God is Love.

It is this God-Love whom I have chosen as the Ideal of my life.

And love calls for love: I deeply desire to respond to this love of God. But how can I love God?

The sacred book of Christians, the Gospel, says that in order to love God, feelings are not enough. It is necessary, in fact, to do his will. And we find his will expressed in the words of Jesus.

Of all these words, one strikes us very deeply and sums up all the others. Jesus had said, "This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you."

My friends and I decide to live this commandment of Jesus, in order to do God's will as an expression of our love for him.

Jesus has told us *how* we should love one another: he had said, "A man has no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends."

He gave his life for us by dying on the cross. He, the Son of God, gave his life for each one of us so that we too could become children of God.

Following his example, we had to love one another to the point of being ready to die for each other. And so, abandoning our individualism, we tried to give our mutual love the same measure as his.

Love for our neighbors, however, did not require so much our physical death, but rather a sharing of other people's suffering and pain, hopes and joys. In this way the suffering was divided, the joys multiplied.

Love prompted us to put all our material possessions in common, as well as our spiritual riches: our aspirations, decisions, discoveries, and experiences. We remained faithful to the pact we had made to love always like this and when we failed, we started over again.

This way of life has had undreamed-of consequences. We have discovered that the deeper the roots of a plant go into the earth, the more its stem grows and its leaves unfold; so too, the more we go towards our neighbor out of love for God, the more we are lifted up to God, and our union with him increases.

This was our experience. The more we loved our brothers and sisters by denying and forgetting ourselves, the more we found, when it was time to pray, that our union with God had grown.

And there was another effect of this way of life: Jesus said, "By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples." We loved one another, and many persons who did not know Jesus or had forgotten him, re-discovered him and came back to him.

After two months, already 500 persons in the city of Trent were living the same life we lived — men and women, religious and lay people, adults and children.

Another effect of this way of life was a kind of inner enlightenment. "Where there is charity and love" — our faith tells us — "there is God." God was among us because we loved one another, and he enlightened our minds with a very new light that made us understand more deeply the word of God.

In the air raid shelters where we would run to escape the bombs, we opened the Gospel, read its sacred words and then put them into practice.

Our sacred book says that you pass from death to life by loving your neighbor. And we have experienced this spiritual 'life.' In loving one another our hearts have found a peace we had never before known, a fullness of joy, a new zeal and a strengthening of our will.

Jesus had said: "Give and you will receive." We gave away as much as we could to those who were in need, and right in the midst of the hardships of the war, sacks of food and other provisions continued to arrive.

"Every human being, made in the image of God has the possibility of a certain personal relationship with him."

Jesus had said: "And everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or land for the sake of my name will be repaid a hundred times over, and also inherit eternal life."

We had put God first in our lives, and in second place the affection we held for mother, father, relatives; as well as our work and material possessions... and the words of the Gospel came true! More than a hundred houses were opened to us: all those who had been drawn by this same spiritual life became our brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, and whatever they had was also ours.

Jesus had said, "Ask and you will obtain." I can still remember one day at the very beginning of our new life. I had seen a poor man without any shoes and I asked Jesus for them in a Church, specifying size 12. On my way out of Church, I met a lady who handed me some shoes: they were size 12. This was just the beginning of an endless series of similar events, simple and yet extraordinary.

Yes the Gospel was true. We had known it through faith. Now our experience was proving it to us.

We would take one sentence of the Gospel at a time in order to re-evangelize our lives and become more and more similar to Jesus acquiring his way of feeling, seeing, loving and acting. In this way, the Christian revolution was launched in and around us, that revolution which is peace, unity, forgiveness and the fire of love. The flames began to spread first of all in Italy, then throughout Europe, in North and South America and in the other continents, among people of every age, race and vocation.

The Gospel was accepted in its entirety.

Not just the part that spoke of joy, but also the part that spoke of suffering.

In fact, Jesus says that we must be like the grain of wheat which dies in order to bear fruit, that we must accept the necessary pruning, the trials he sends us so that our spiritual life might develop.

The members of the Movement know this. They have experienced suffering and its beneficial effects.

Our suffering — a great deal of suffering — accepted out of love has been one of the causes for the Movement's rapid spreading throughout the world. But it has also been through much suffering accepted from the hands of God that we have experienced a deeper union with him.

In fact, through purifications sent by God we can gradually enter into contemplation of the things of God. And thus, there is a certain penetration into his mysteries.

If Christians remain faithful to the message of love and suffering contained in the Gospel, the Spirit of God leads them to the deepest possible union with Christ, until they can say of themselves, at least in certain privileged moments of their spiritual experience, "I live now not with my life but with the life of Christ who lives in me" (Ga.2:20).

Then, having become another Christ, in Christ, Christians participate in Jesus' relationship of sonship to the Father.

And the basic mystery of Christian life, which is God who is One and Three, while remaining obscure and unintelligible, is in a certain way revealed to Christians through their personal religious experience.

Thus they comprehend how God is Love, not only because he loves humanity and all he created: God is love, Christians begin to realize, above all, in his very nature. He is the Father who, from all eternity, generates the Son out of love. He loves the Son and is loved by him in return. Their mutual love is the Holy Spirit.

It is this type of contemplation which forms people who can bear witness to the Church — true apostles — who go through the world to bring peace and announce joy to their fellow human beings. They are great servants of humanity.

And so if it is true, as I said at the beginning, that by loving our neighbor, we deepen our love for God, it is also true that by loving God so deeply as to reach contemplation we receive a marvelous thrust for going back into the midst of the world to love everyone.

The essence of my experience is all here — the more one loves others, the more one finds God. The more one finds God, the more one loves others.

The Movement in its forty or so years of life has spread not only among Catholics of almost all the nations in the world, but has also penetrated, during the last twenty years, into Christian Churches of other Traditions, bringing a much appreciated contribution toward the complete reunification of Christians which our times demand.

And since, in this world of ours, we often meet brothers and sisters of other faiths as well, we are living a marvelous experience. Every human being, made in the image of God, has the possibility of a certain personal relationship with him. Indeed, the very nature of man leads him exactly to this communion. Here then are the various affinities which we note between our religion and the others existing today.

It is these affinities which we find also in you, dearest brothers and sisters, which permit us to walk side by side on life's holy journey toward the goal awaiting us, and to work together for the good of humanity.

ON THE ROAD to UNITY

compiled by Gabriella Fallacara

Chiara Lubich with a group of participants from Sweden.

Photos by Giancarlo Nuzzolo

An account of an ecumenical meeting held at Rocca di Papa, Italy, as related by two participants from England, Stuart Burns, an Anglican priest, and Martin Smith, a member of the United Reformed Church.

"As we crossed the Tiber in Rome and the Arno in Florence," Martin Smith recounted, "the refrain '... we can see each other across the water, but our looks are cold and distant carrying only bitterness and hatred,' slipped easily to mind, with a special poignancy as we had come to Italy from a world in which religious bigotry was threatening the Pope's visit to England, car bombs were reverberating around Belfast and the battle-fleet from Britain's Royal Navy was on its way to Argentina. The song continues, 'Together we can build a bridge, to reach out to one another, together we can build a bridge of love,' and this 'building bridges together' was the experience we had all come to live as we began to discover the meaning of being united."

Martin Smith is a young Englishman belonging to the United Reformed Church. He participated in the week-long ecumenical gathering organized by the *Centro Uno*, the center of ecumenical activities of the Focolare Movement, and held at Rocca di Papa, Italy.

"We were 160 pilgrims, ninety Anglicans, seventy Swedish and Finnish Lutherans together with Catholics, Methodists, Presbyterians and members of the United Reformed Church. We came from Great Britain, Ireland, Sweden, Denmark and Finland, gathered together by the *Centro Uno* to explore the theme of 'Unity.' "

It was announced that the week would be an adventure: "It will be something that takes place within each one of us, something that the Holy Spirit will bring about finding

The experience of an Anglican ecumenist

"I am very happy to be here. The countryside is familiar to me because my visits to Rocca di Papa and Grottaferrata date back to the time before the Mariapolis Center was built. Of all the various meetings which I have attended here in the past, one in particular stands out most vividly in my mind. I have a picture of it here in my purse. It was in April 1964. Looking back, I remember with joy and gratitude the friendship built in those early days with the Ecumenical Movement and with the Focolare Movement, and I remember all that it meant to my husband and myself.

These were the opening words of Margaret Pawley, wife of the late Archdeacon Bernard Pawley. At his funeral last November, Dr. Robert Runcie, Primate of the Anglican Church, said: "Our debt to him in the amazing transformation of Anglican-Roman Catholic relations is incalculable."

During the Second Vatican Council, Dr. Pawley held the post of Observer at the Council representing the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pawley family took up residence in Rome. A few years before, they had met Chiara Lubich and some of her first companions, and Mrs. Pawley readily showed us the photos of those "beautiful moments."

A student of ecumenical history, Margaret Pawley, together with her husband wrote a book entitled: "Rome and Canterbury Through Four Centuries." On the eve of Pope John Paul II's visit to Britain, a new edition of the book was issued. "Its focus is on the past," Mrs. Pawley explained, "when, even though the light of hope for the future was enkindled in many Anglicans and Catholics, misunderstandings and strained relationships often prevailed."

During the ecumenical meeting, Mrs. Pawley presented the theme, "Ecumenism: A Difficult Path?" In it she spoke of complete unity, the reunion of Christians in one visible body, a committing task for both the present and future.

In a personal analysis she described the "... richness to be gathered into the new whole, to give glory to God. There will be the dedication, discipline and spirit of personal sacrifice of the Roman Catholics; the fellowship and enthusiasm of the Methodists; the emphasis on commitment in Baptism found among the Baptists; the sense of waiting upon the Holy Spirit of the Quakers; the intellectual integrity of the Lutherans, and what of the Anglicans? Perhaps the experience of trying to be both catholic and reformed."

[In the above picture we see Mrs. Margaret Pawley (second from the left) holding her daughter Felicity. Beside her on her left is Chiara Lubich, Eli Folonari holding Matthew Pawley, Dr. Bernard Pawley, and Argentine Bishop Adolfo Servando Tortolo. Also in the picture, taken outside the Mariapolis Center of Rocca di Papa in 1964, are some of the first focolarine.]

hearts that are more open, more sensitive, more grateful, more united in Christ. We want to make this act of freedom of spirit together, and allow the Holy Spirit to send us his surprises."

A full program certainly left ample opportunity for him to do so. Some of the highlights of the week were the talks given by Chiara Lubich, Roman Catholic Bishop Charles Henderson of Southwark (London), Anglican Bishop John Dennis of Knaresborough and Margaret Pawley, widow of the late Archdeacon of Canterbury Bernard Pawley. Mrs. Pawley with her husband has been involved in work for unity since the Second Vatican Council.

We were also privileged to hear from Archbishop Ramon Torrella Cascante, Vice-President of the Secretariat for Christian Unity, and Bishop Richard Stewart. They spoke on how theological contacts with various Christian Churches have helped carry ahead the activities of the Secretariat for Christian Unity.

"We made many unforgettable visits," Stuart Burns, an Anglican minister recounted. "Since most of us were Protestants, perhaps the most significant was the Vatican, where although few among so many thousands, we were greeted by the Pope with these words, 'I would like to give a special greeting to ... the ecumenical group meeting at Rocca di Papa, all of whose members I greet with friendship and respect.' The bishops in our party were personally introduced to the Pope."

Bishop Keith Arnold, who is the Anglican Ecumenical Representative in the diocese of Coventry recalled: "I discovered in Rome itself quite a new spirit of ecumenism which for me was dramatically illustrated by the readiness of the Catholic bishops to accept me among them in the presence of the Pope, and to receive his own gracious welcome at his audience. This for me was an unforgettable joy and one which I could not have conceived a few years ago."

"... although signs of tension were all around in the world, signs of growth towards unity were stronger..."

"Following the papal audience, so close to the tomb of St. Peter," Martin Smith recounted, "we went to the abbey in whose basilica St. Paul is buried. We were guests of the monks there for lunch. We ended the day at the Catacombs of St. Domitilla where we experienced a new dimension of unity: worshiping in the place where some of the earliest Christians in Rome had met together in adoration of God."

Bishop Dennis commented: "It was an enormous privilege to receive permission to celebrate at St. Domitilla's in the catacombs. The Catholics were present also in large numbers to express their unity with us in common prayer while recognizing our inability as yet to share the Sacrament together. In all this and in all the relationships built up over the week I was deeply aware of a profound sense of the presence of the living Christ."

"Although there were many talks and visits," Stuart Burns affirmed, "we were not there to observe progress towards unity from the sidelines, but to participate in making it happen. Chiara Lubich, in speaking to us, reminded us that although signs of tension were all around in the world, signs of growth towards unity were stronger, not just in the Church, but also in social and political spheres as well; and the same experience made by focolarini[1] participating in this Movement for unity has confirmed for us that the Gospel is true, and that putting it into practice, word by word, brings about a change of heart in those around us.

"We understood that unity comes about when we begin to see each

ABOVE: During the audience in St. Peter's Square, a cordial encounter took place between the Holy Father and Anglicans and Catholic Bishops participating in the convention. (From left to right: Pope John Paul II with Catholic bishop Charles Henderson, and Anglican bishops John Dennis and Keith Arnold.

BELOW: Bishop Ramon Torrella (left), Vice-President of the Secretariat for Christian Unity.

The Vice-President of the Secretariat for Christian Unity, Bishop Ramon Torrella spoke at the meeting emphasizing the fact that in order to confront the obstacles to unity we must fill our hearts with humility, love, perserverance and courage. He then answered several questions from the group.

The Secretariat for Christian Unity is a relatively new office in the Vatican, created by Pope John XXIII in 1960 in preparation for the Council. The first president of the Secretariat was Cardinal Bea. After the Council Pope Paul VI made this office a permanent institution in the Roman Curia. After Cardinal Bea's death in 1968, Cardinal Willebrands was nominated president.

The team working in the Secretariat includes the Vice-President Bishop Torrella, two under-secretaries, nine priests specialized in the dialogues with other Christian Churches and six secretaries.

Thirty members, cardinals or bishops, and thirty-five consultants, meet every eighteen months for the plenary session of the Secretariat, whose name translated from Latin means "Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity." Its work involves activities both within the Catholic Church and in relationship with other Christian Churches in the world.

The ecumenical convention concluded at the Church of San Miniato in Florence with a Catholic Mass celebrated in the basilica and the Anglican Eucharist in the crypt.

neighbor in each moment as the person God has given us as an opportunity and obligation to serve in a spirit of humility. It is the presence of Christ which unites us. Only his presence can persuade others through our continual, quiet testimony. It was like a discovery for us to feel the urgency of making the commitment to live this."

Early in the week Bishop John Dennis addressed the gathering speaking of the Anglican understanding of unity. He underlined repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation, which urge the faithful to fervent prayer, as a starting point to build unity between the two Churches.

Catholic bishop Charles Henderson's talk concerned unity among individuals: in our Churches we need to air our differences in a spirit of honesty, trust and openness. This will be possible if we have become friends and made the interests and concerns of others our own, imitating Jesus. It will be Jesus then to make us capable of a true personal friendship with the faithful of different traditions. He will clear the path towards full unity.

"That's what we experienced during this week," commented Matthew Pawley, a young Anglican student. "It hasn't made the slightest bit of difference whether you were Catholic, Lutheran, or Anglican, or whether we spoke different languages. The Focolare Movement is getting people together who say: 'We all love God, we all worship the Trinity, why then can't we do it together instead of each one on their own?"

"Near the end of the week," Martin Smith continued, "we journeyed to Loppiano, the international minicity of the Focolare Movement in Tuscany, where the law of the Gospel is the rule for everyday life. We were warmly and enthusiastically welcomed: particularly moving for those of us from Britain was the warm welcome we received from the Argentines. At the end of the day we all shared in worship, praying together for peace. And during the celebration of the Anglican Eucharist many Catholics who were not able to participate fully in this service, remained to pray with us, offering their suffering for all that still divides our two Churches."

"For Sunday morning worship," Stuart Burns concluded, "we gaththered in the Church of San Miniato in Florence and afterwards were welcomed by Abbot Aldinucci who read a letter of welcome from Cardinal Benelli, the Archbishop of Florence. At the conclusion, we met with the Focolare community of Florence. Here we felt, we could see the work of the Holy Spirit in uniting the broken body of Christ and the possibilities for us to be involved in this work if we go ahead united in the desire to seek the will of God in each moment."

In this words of Anglican Bishop Arnold: "Coming to Rocca di Papa has given me a new vision and a new impetus in the search for unity ... I am more sure than ever that unity is not an option but an obligation, and that it has to do primarily with love."

1) See inside back cover.

1982 MARIAPOLIS

toward a more united world

Every day we witness in this world, which we love, the most painful wounds brought about by endless disunities.

And yet our modern world longs for and seeks unity. The number of men and women of good will who are working at bridging the many gaps existing among individuals, families, groups and so on continues to grow.

We, too, are engaged in this endeavor.

In fact, the specific vocation of the Focolare Movement is to work toward the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer, "Father, may they all be one" (John 17:21).

The Mariapolis offers an experience of unity. It is a sign of hope and a step *toward a more united world*.

The audience at the Mariapolis in Las Vegas, New Mexico

About the Mariapolis

For many years the summer gatherings of the Focolare Movement have been called "Mariapolis" (City of Mary). As Mary brought Jesus into the world, so the people living in these "temporary cities," wish to generate Jesus' presence among them through their mutual and constant love: "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Mt.18:20).

For one week the Mariapolis offers to hundreds of people of all ages and walks of life a very full program that includes general sessions with talks on the spirituality of unity, sharing of experiences in living this spirituality, documentaries, meetings in small sharing groups and recreational programs. The Mariapolis is a time for prayer and recollection. The celebration of the Eucharist is at the center of each day and all the participants gather together at the conclusion of activities for evening prayer.

Children have separate activities which involve them in the life of the Mariapolis through various spiritual and recreational programs. Special programs are available for teenagers as well.

The week, however, is more than the sum of the parts. It is an experience of how life, also everyday life, can be transformed if love and unity are its foundation. When the Mariapolis ends, people find that it was not only a tremendously enjoyable week, but they have experienced a way of living that they will be able to bring back home.

For the U.S.A. and Canada this year the Mariapolis took place at:

Las Vegas, New Mexico, from June 27 to July 3;
Whitewater, Wisconsin, from July 11 to July 17;
Bellingham, Washington, from July 18 to July 24 and
Alfred, New York, from August 8 to August 14

Many young people participate in the Mariapolis and add a note of enthusiasm to the program. In the photo a group of children in the Mariapolis of Bellingham, Washington.

Archimandrite Justinian Dalea, an Orthodox priest who had traveled to the Mariapolis of Alfred, New York from Alliance, Ohio, addressed the participants of the Mariapolis saying:

At the moment of the presentation of the cross.

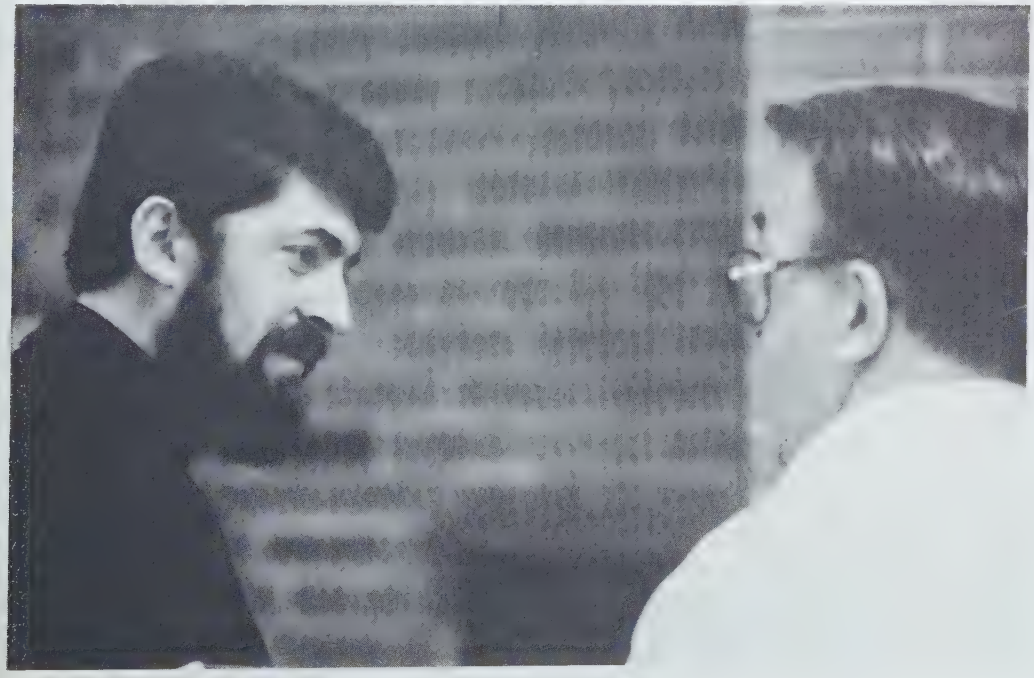
"Dear sweet Mariapolis, I'm very happy to partake at the Mariapolis, this pilgrimage meeting of the Focolare Movement. It is not my first occasion to meet the people of God who bear the Focolare name. I learned about it in West Germany where I saw the Christian symbiosis of different Christian denominations.

Seeing them, I understood that the union began not by the letter but by the spirit which gives life and inspires and strengthens the faith. I also had the opportunity to visit and to see the birthplace of the Focolare Movement, and I was in Rome at the Mariapolis in Rocca di Papa, the Ecumenical Center which deserves this name. There were Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox clergy and lay people together, and you could see over there a small paradise, and dream of a total unity among all Christians."

Father Dalea later wanted to offer his Pectoral Cross as a gift to the Focolare, "Because," as he said, "I want to honor you, and I will give you my Pectoral Cross as a symbol of peace."

Jane Ellison, an espicopalian from North Carolina, with her little daughter Emy. Many people from different Christian churches took part in all the Mariapolises of North America.

Sharing is an important part of the Mariapolis.



"Seeds of Peace for a United World"

"Seeds of Peace for a United World" was the title of an evening of silence, meditation and prayer for peace. Readings were interspersed with songs, dances, pantomimes and experiences all focused on the theme of building peace in our world.

The evening concluded with the audience coming forward, one at a time, and pinning a brightly colored flower on a tree. As they were doing so, the name of each nation was mentioned, giving the opportunity to pray for peace for all people on earth. In the end, the tree was fully covered signifying that one day the world will be one and we will all be at peace.

Every day of the Mariapolis people who try to build unity in the world shared their experiences. The following is one of them.

In the family we have been exposed to the spirituality of unity of the Focolare, and to the degree that we have, we try to live it. That doesn't mean that we automatically just have it without any effort on our own part. We've discovered that it is an effort we have to be willing to make each and every day, sometimes many times during the day.

I guess you could liken the acts of love we offer to each other to the drop of oil that gets the machine going, this is how we can build this spirit of unity within our home. But, like everyone else, we have enormous pressures all around us, and sometimes it's more difficult than others to maintain this unity among us. And it's at those times that we are really called to put into practice all the things that we have learned and experienced.

An example: one evening we were together as a family having our evening meal and one of our teenage children, one of the boys was talking about his friend who had gotten a B-B gun. He was saying how he really thought it was a lot of fun, you could just see his whole enthusiasm and excitement for his friend who had one. As he was talking, I could sense that my husband was feeling somewhat impatient with the whole topic because for many years my husband and I have had sort of an aversion to guns, and B-B guns in particular. We both have known people who were very badly hurt by them. It was sort of an unwritten rule in our family that we really didn't want our children anywhere around anybody who was shooting B-B guns, just for all the inherent dangers that we were convinced could occur.

So as my son was continuing to talk with his real youthful enthusiasm about how terrific it might be to have one of these things, I could sense this whole growing impatience in my husband. Finally, he just cut in and said, "You know, I really think that having a gun is very foolish, it's dangerous, it's almost irresponsible. And I really don't want any of our children in any way to involve themselves with this whole thing." That was the end of it. Silence followed.

I was aware that my son was getting very aggravated that his opinion wasn't being respected. The mood of the meal changed. I know I did not help because I began thinking that my husband had overreacted, that he could have been more patient in that moment, etc. So we all left the meal table with the sense that a nice dinner had just been ruined. Not only that, but I was afraid we all thought that the other should be the one to restore unity because we all knew well what was the right thing to do.

I knew in my heart, however, that in that moment I was called to do it without waiting another moment. So the very first thing for me to do was to love my husband and not add to the pain by telling him that perhaps he had not handled the whole thing as well as he could have. So when he had to leave shortly after the meal, I gave him a hug and a kiss which meant I appreciated and understood all the pressures that he is under and the strain that they can create.

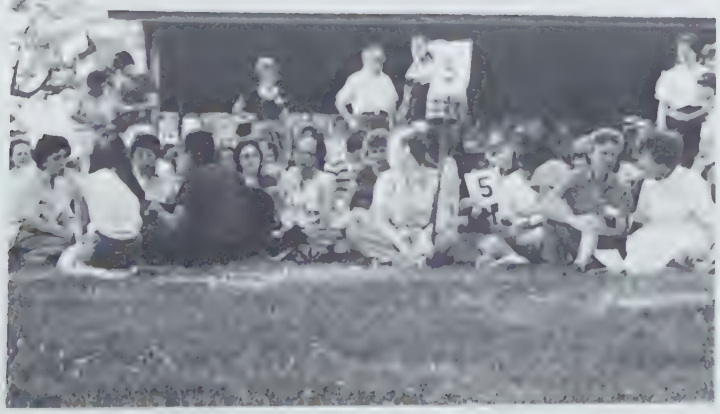
Later I took the time to talk to my son. I could tell he was very upset and angry and I told him how very proud I was of him. I totally agreed with his father about B-B guns — I said — but I wanted him to know I had observed how much self-control he had exercised even if he was really frustrated his father wouldn't understand his position. I guess I wanted to point out to him that love takes many forms and respect is one of them. He had lived the commandment, "Honor your father and your mother."

Later in the evening my husband came in, and as he walked in I just knew from the whole expression about him that he had felt the pain of the separation, and he knew his responsibility to restore the love and the unity. He went right over to our son and he gave him a big hug and a kiss. It was obvious he wanted to be the first to love and not wait for our son to come to him. That act of love really seemed to dissipate the anger that had been there previously and so much peace was restored, but I guess it wasn't really till the next day that the real final threads of unity were sown again. I knew that I had to again make the time, make the effort to love my son and let him have more an opportunity to discuss what had happened further. He still had a lot of feelings going on inside of him — even if he had been touched by my husband's gesture of love. He seemed to feel this need to establish who had been right, who had been wrong. As we talked about that, I tried to get us to the point where we could see together that it isn't always the issue that's so important but the capacity to love in given situation. Again I told him that his self-control had really helped to not inflame the situation, that he hadn't said some of the angry things in that moment that he had been thinking and I wanted him to really appreciate how God had blessed him in that moment. Later that night when my husband and I had time to talk, we recognized how we can strengthen the unity among us, we saw how from time to time either one of us needs the support and the love of the other one to help restore the unity in the home. My husband, sensitive now to how angry our son had been, again went over to him. It was really beautiful to see them kid about a subject which had created such a heated discussion the night before. I don't know whether anybody's opinions were changed about the value or the dangers of B-B guns, but the flow of love was restored in our home, and where love is present everything can be resolved.

U.L.

"...the flow of love was restored in our home, and where love is present everything can be resolved."

An afternoon of games in the open is customary at the Mariapolis. The winning team is the one that is able to work together in unity.



THE HERITAGE OF RADI

"Radi made me understand that you can't go looking for answers outside yourself... What counts is to give God the first place... and then what appears to be small and useless turns out to be the cornerstone..."

compiled by
ANNA MARIA PERICOLI

Looking at the class photo taken at the end of the year on an outing to Assisi, it would be hard to pick her out as the teacher. Even in size she was smaller than some of her students. The photo reveals a close-knit group, with all the variety you would expect to find in a seventh-grade class.

Now this group has gone on to the eighth grade, but these past months have been very hard for them.

"What's the problem?" the principal asked the group she had assembled in front of her one day.

"Well," one student began, "ever since Miss Follador left, things haven't been the same. With her we could always work things out. She kept us together..."

I too went to talk with these young students, and on their own initiative, one after another, they spoke up eagerly, their words overlapping as they completed each other's thoughts. They were serious; sometimes their eyes filled with tears, but clearly it was a relief to be able to say what "Miss Follador" had meant to them.

"We got along well with her," they told me. "Not that our new teacher isn't good. She is very good. But it's just that it was hard to lose Miss Follador. She was more than a teacher who walks in, gives a lesson, asks some questions and walks out when the hour is over. When she realized that maybe somebody was having a hard time at school or at home, she didn't give him a 'D' and forget about it. She'd check into it, ask what was wrong, and make you feel as though you were handling the problem together; she'd deal with us on a one-to-one basis..."

"In class, it seemed as though we were twenty-two students, plus an extra one, better than the others, who'd help us out."

"She could be very serious when it came to important matters, but she could also be fun."

"She wasn't rigid: she'd change her plans to fit the class. When we'd go on class trips, she'd joke and sing. It was fun with her... she seemed like one of us..."

None of her colleagues, until a short time ago, knew that Itala (Radi within the Focolare Movement) had consecrated her life to God; nor did they know that after school hours, she was responsible for the development of the Focolare Movement in Emilia Romagna, a large province set in the heart of Italy. It was for this reason that she would often travel to surrounding

cities and towns to visit the Focolare communities. Already years ago, when she was teaching high school in Salsomaggiore, her co-workers assumed that Radi's constant traveling was to visit her fiance. She did not mind having her life (which at the moment she could not explain) appear like anyone else's, caught up in the rhythm of everyday events.

Her colleagues at her last post, St. John's High School in Persiceto, now note the absence of the "peacemaker."

"During faculty meetings," one of her teachers recounted, "we would often have to decide matters concerning the welfare of the students. When some of us would flare up over something trivial and end up being at odds with one another, Radi was always ready to step forward and serve as a bridge between the differing parties.

"In the end, with the patience of Job, she would manage to mend the broken relationships. At times, she'd lose whole afternoons resolving these tensions."

"It's true," another said, "just by talking with her, one would feel encouraged. Not that she was an exuberant person, but her serenity gave a sense of peace. Seeing her in the morning, one started the day off right."

Anna, one of Radi's friends, told me, "I used to be a leftist and perhaps because of what I lived through, the war, etc., when I began my journey toward God, I looked at the Gospel with a very practical mind! I started out with great enthusiasm, but I soon realized that deals with God are something very serious. It was Radi — with her concreteness and simplicity — who helped me at this point. Through her I came to understand how Jesus is in us. After every visit with Radi, I came away more aware of his presence in people.

"She wasn't one to call attention to herself. In fact, when someone praised her for a job well done, Radi would put it into perspective right away. She was humble, sturdy like a rock. She gave you the sense of that dignity a Christian should have.

"I remember when I confided to her how much I was suffering from glaucoma. I told her, 'I can't even cry because if I do, the collyrium in my eyes will cause greater pain.' She told me, 'It is difficult to find words to console those who suffer. Only through experiencing it in your own flesh do you come to understand it. It gives you a new dimension for understanding others. But I assure you that I am sharing your pain.' It was as though she were telling me: 'There is a hidden plan of love here, but the only one who can discover it is you.' Without too many words and questions, she reached my inner self and helped me find God.

"On the other hand, she was like one of us. She knew all about our tastes, the local art, even the dishes

OPPOSITE PAGE: A picture of Radi taken in 1963 at Grottaferrata when she had already made her "choice" in the Focolare Movement which she had known since she was 15 years old.
BELOW: Radi with her seventh grade class on their outing to Assisi.

BELOW: Radi (far right) on a camping trip with her brother Marco and her two sisters Anna and Giulia.
OPPOSITE PAGE: A recent photo of Radi Follador.

that are typical of our area. One could never tell that she was not born in this region. I don't know how to explain how it happened, but Radi made me understand that the more you strive towards the divine, the more complete you become as a human being."

I spoke with another of Radi's friends whose background and temperament made her seem the exact opposite of Anna. She was the contemplative type and, unlike Anna, she found the practicality of life alien to her. Yet she too said similar things about Radi: "For years I had searched for a solution to my problems, for some ways that I could find my place in life," she told me. "I'd make retreats; once in a while I would go to Africa to work in a hospital. At other times I'd try to give a hand to kids on drugs, or to others with different problems. Unaware of the danger, at times I would get myself into 'heavy' situations. But Radi made me understand that you can't go looking for answers outside yourself. It doesn't matter which area of need you are involved in; what counts is to give God the first place in your life. She also helped me understand that the one who is sick or lonely, who seems to contribute nothing to society, or the one who feels worthless, is in reality the very cornerstone... This reversal of logic, which I understood from her to be Christianity, changed my life. This becomes clearer to me now more than ever.

"I had lost the hope of being able to do something about certain delicate complexes and complications within me. My deep friendship with Radi helped me approach them again with the trust that my problems could be solved.

"Each person who knew Radi had the impression of being important to her. To mean something to another helps one to gain self-confidence. Maybe one remembers having received that kind of love only from a mother, if indeed from her. I think Radi believed that in order to be a whole Christian, you had to be a whole person. And she tried to reconstruct this 'wholeness' in others with a boundless vision of a soul that believes and hopes all things. In a certain sense, she 'recreated' me, even down to the kind of clothes I wore. She even went shopping with me because I didn't care what I wore. In this way, she gave value to every aspect of life — especially to the little things that others might have considered banal. Not too many extraordinary things in fact happen in our life..."

About one year ago, Radi began to feel sick. After a period of tests in the hospital, the doctors discovered that she had an incurable disease. Hearing that, she took care of matters at school, kept in touch with her temporary substitute, and with the teacher who would later take over her classes, so as to make the adjustment for her students as easy as possible.

At the same time she began traveling to the cities and towns to visit the Focolare communities entrusted to her. The more she traveled, the more difficult it became for her. One leg would become so swollen that she had to keep it elevated for a long while before she could pull her boot on. The pain in her back would be so severe at times that she had to walk doubled over. Getting in and out of cars had become very difficult for her. Yet she kept going because she wanted to put everything in order while the doctors were trying to decide whether or not to operate.

All through this period, she remained very attentive to the needs of others. Notwithstanding the physical effort it entailed, she went to buy a skirt she had seen in a shop window, the perfect size for her friend Maria Luisa. With her usual lightheartedness she wrote to another, "You know, Mari, they have found out what I have, but they won't operate. Don't you want to come and see me? My 'brother donkey'[1] refuses to travel now...."

An operation was performed to lighten her back pain; it also verified her condition. There was no longer any doubt about the stage of her illness. She commented, "But now I don't have to wonder if I am half-way along the journey or if I am about to arrive at the end." Day by day, in the hospital room she continued to handle her responsibilities: her studies, reports to be finished, financial matters to conclude, the preparations for a scheduled meeting for the youth. Continually Radi would reassure those who would have to continue her work, saying, "Don't worry; it is God who does everything." She also used to repeat, "After all, everything can be done because Jesus Forsaken[2] makes possible the impossible. At a certain point of our life, as when climbing a mountain, we have to plant a spike (Jesus Forsaken), attach a rope and hold on to it in order to continue climbing, without ever letting go."

All of us in the Focolare were living the last leg of her 'journey' together. As her condition worsened, two members of the Movement, Vale, a focolarina, and Lucia (a doctor), remained with her constantly in order to reassure her that this vital relationship of unity would not lessen for one instant.

Only three-quarters of an hour before she went into a coma, Radi sealed the last four letters addressed to the center of the Movement. As soon as she realized that her agony was starting, two tears appeared in her eyes. But immediately she braced herself. Then together with those at her bedside, she was ready to face that last important moment. "A little more suffering," she said, "but all of us are already risen with him."

Afterwards, Lucia, who assisted her to the end, said, "It is impossible to explain how someone could maintain so much self-control over one of the worst illnesses that exist. One of my colleagues told me, 'She had an extraordinary interior strength; this must have helped her endure the pain.' We are accustomed to seeing despair on the part of the terminally ill.

"Of course it is difficult to determine the limit to which one can endure pain; but Radi must have acquired a noteworthy capacity to withstand it. For example, many nights, she could not sleep. One inevitably expects the patient to lose control and become anxious. But Radi didn't. She was able to overcome the obstacles.

"In the first stages of her illness, the difficulties could have been a psychological type, resulting from a long series of tests which usually revealed nothing conclusive. Then when we discovered the nature of her illness, we tried to conceal it from her. However, as lucid as Radi was, she must have had an intuition of what was going on. She did not reveal that she understood and avoided all questions that would have embarrassed us.

"I knew that she was living through moments of real anxiety and fear; however, I saw her focus on finishing her work. The uncertainty, I thought, could have blocked her ability to concentrate, but it never did. In those moments, I began to see that unity meant everything to her. She had no hesitations about it and she would let you know,too, when you were off the track... Once I said to her, 'Radi, you're so sick, you can't even stand up. Can't you write this letter-report tomorrow?' And she, knowing that I did not understand the importance of what she was doing answered, 'Don't you know that for us who want to live in unity, not to nourish it with communication is like doing nothing.'

"Suffering intensified during the last stage of her illness. I saw her watching her own progressive detachment from everything, supported by her spiritual resources, yet fully paying the price for it as every human being.

"Then, toward the end, I could no longer understand Radi, partly because it was such an effort for her to talk, but mostly because words themselves no longer could convey what she was living through. There was the whole deterioration of her condition, a body destroyed, a brain that hardly received any more oxygen. Everything was collapsing because she was dying. Yet even when she could not speak anymore she tried to respond with all of herself to our presence, loving up to the very last moment, thus transforming it into a real passage from life to life."

1) The particular expression which St. Francis used when referring to his body when it could no longer keep pace with the demands of his spirit.
2) Refers to when Jesus cried out on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (Mt.27:46).

LC TIE LINE throughout the world

The LC Tie Line of this issue offers to our readers some thoughts that Chiara Lubich shared in a conversation with members of the Focolare Movement.

Let us focus our attention on the Word of Life we were trying to live recently: "And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world" (Mt.28:20).

Jesus has promised, then, to be with us always; in fact, he emphasized that he would be with us *every day*. He has decided to be in our company.

What then should our attitude be?

It should be one of infinite gratitude to him for this decison. We should prepare ourselves to be with him in the best possible way. If we knew that an important person had decided to come and live with us for a period of time, we would certainly make sure that he did not find the door closed. We would prepare for his visit in every way. We would do everything with him in mind.

Now we know that Jesus himself is with us every day until the end of the world. What should we do then? First of all, I think it is important to find out where he could be. We know that he is present here on earth in the Blessed Sacrament, in the poor, in those who act and speak in his name, in authority, in his word and in each one of us because of grace....

This year we have understood that when it comes to the members of the Movement, Jesus wants us to find him especially in one place: in our midst. This is what he wants. We could think, in fact, that one of the reasons why he brought about our Movement was so that he could be present everywhere — not only in the church buildings, but also there in the midst of peoples wherever they live, wherever they are.

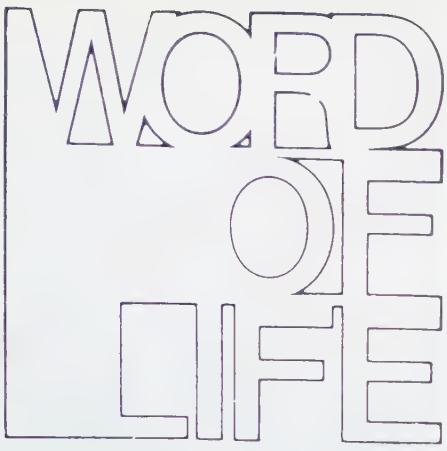
So let's make room for him in our midst especially among those who, with us, want to love him. From there he will be able to irradiate love and light to many others in the world. By reviving our duty of service, by making ourselves mutually one with each other, we make it possible for him to be alive in our midst; let us not make life difficult for him. Let's let him reign among us and, remain with us so that we, too, can be with him. We couldn't hope for a better friend on the journey of our life, and we could never measure the effect of this divine company.

Chiara Lubich

Images FOR words

"I do not think of myself as having reached the finish line. I give no thought to what lies behind but push on to what is ahead."

Saint Paul (Phil. 3:13)



"Anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant."

(Mark 10:43)

The word makes us live.

The word makes us free.

The word guarantees happiness.

The word converts.

The word purifies us.

The word draws us to our specific vocations.

The word brings forth the hatred of the world and the sanctity of the disciple.

The word makes us see the truth.

The word brings comfort.

The word gives us joy.

The word produces works.

The word gives wisdom.

The word preserves us from human concerns.

The word obtains everything.

The word brings about union with God.

The word gives us hope of eternal life.

The word makes us one.

The word changes one's mentality.

The word makes each soul a heaven.

"Anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Mk. 10:43).

James and John, two of Jesus' disciples, approached him with an unusual request: they wanted to know if in his glory, that is, in heaven, they could be seated one at his right hand and the other at his left. The Teacher, however, first wanted to be sure that they were ready to suffer as he would. When they, without giving it too much thought and trusting in their own strength, replied affirmatively, he explained to them that those places already belonged to those 'to whom they had been allotted.'

The other apostles then became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them all together and said: "You know that among the pagans their so-called rulers lord it over them and their great men make their authority felt. This is not to happen among you..." and he concluded saying:

"Anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant."

The disciples' ambition to be at the right and the left of Jesus in his glory shows that they still had an earthly concept of the kingdom that Christ had established. Their attitude reflects the way of thinking of the Jews of that time. They had not yet understood that one can reach "glory" only by following Jesus in his passion and death.

"Anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant."

Jesus' words are clear and revolutionary: the disciple's true greatness lies in serving, serving concretely.

This is what serving, which originally meant 'serving at table,' means here.

Jesus, in spite of his authority, never dominated the others. He made himself the servant of all, including his disciples.

The kind of service Jesus wants from his disciples is that they love to the point of being ready to give up everything — even their life — as he did. In fact, the early Church considered the passion and death fo Jesus as the supreme service he had rendered mankind.

"Anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant."

In saying this, Jesus is not condemning those who seek positions of responsibility. Rather, he is affirming that, within the Christian community, those called to positions of leadership must carry out their duty in a spirit of service.

From the very beginning of the Church, these words of Jesus were applied especially to those who held a position of responsibility in the community since the temptation to dominate others may come easily to those in authority.

Jesus rejects any kind of leadership or exercise of authority based on domination, ambition or exploitation. Authority must never become power for its own sake.

"Anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant."

In the Gospel of Mark, it is clear that this rule is applicable to everyone, not only to those in positions of responsibility.

Service should be the rule at the basis of each person's way of life. This calls for a complete change of mentality and urges us to go against the trends of the world around us.

The Church, in fact, is a community of service — both in its internal life and in its relationship with all humanity.

"Anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant."

How then can we live these words?

Let's do everything in a spirit of service, whatever our occupation may be.

If we love Christ in every neighbor we encounter — whether we are peers, or whether we have authority over others or they over us — keeping in mind that Jesus counts as done to himself whatever we do to others, especially to the least, then this attitude of service will come much more easily.

Let's always serve, serve everyone and serve them well. May God help us to astound the world, which is often full of pride and thirsty for power, with our Christian attitude of service towards all, always free from selfish motives.

Christ will then appear much more understandable, and the consequences of the revolution which the Gospel brings about will be much more visible. The cross will lose the negative connotation which is often attributed to it, and will stand out not only as the price of salvation, but also as the symbol of human freedom.

We have before us a challenging and fascinating course of action. Let's not waste the opportunity!

Chiara Lubich

EXPERIENCES

The following are experiences in living the Gospel which some of our readers have shared with us.

I am a freelance writer and editor, and my field is Social Studies. For the past year I have been working for a publishing company located in lower New York City. About a month ago, as the project I was doing for them drew to a close, I began to wonder what kind of a job I would be able to find next. As a self-employed person, so I really can't afford to be out of work, even for a little while.

One day a senior officer of this company came into my office and asked to speak to me. When we got together a little later she told me that she hoped I would continue to work for them even after my current project ended. He explained that they needed someone to help develop new publishing projects and that she thought I'd be at it.

I was extremely relieved to hear his offer, but even so, I didn't accept it immediately. Since I had never done that kind of writing before I wasn't sure that I would be able to do it well. Furthermore, I realized that if the project I helped to develop did not succeed financially I might lose my job as a consequence. I knew that I would feel a lot of pressure in a job of this kind, and I wasn't sure that it would be the best move for me to make. Because of this, I asked this officer if I could postpone a decision on his offer in order to give it more thought. He told me to take all the time I needed.

That same day a colleague of mine asked to have lunch with me. We went over to a delicatessen and sat down, and while we were waiting to order Laurie told me how insecure she felt about her own future. (She is freelance too, and like me, she had no job lined up to follow our project.) After talking for a while, she asked me what I would be doing in the coming months. At that moment I wondered whether it would be wise to tell her about the offer I had just received. Word of it had not yet gotten out around the office, and I wasn't sure if I wanted other people to hear the news before I had reached a decision. In spite of this, I decided to be completely honest with her and tell her the truth.

I explained the offer that I had received and communicated my doubts about taking the job. I also asked her not to talk to anyone about it until I had made up my mind. Laurie told me that she was happy that I had a prospect for work and said that if she were me she would take it. She also mentioned that she had done this type of writng in her former job and had enjoyed doing it.

Several days passed, and I had still not made a decision about whether to accept the job I'd been offered. I was leaning towards saying "yes," however, because no new offers had come my way. As I arrived back from lunch one afternoon Laurie stopped by. This time she was obviously very excited and happy. She told me that she had asked to speak to that senior officer in our company that morning and had informed him of her own experience and skill in developing publishing projects had also told the officer that this was the line of work she wanted to pursue for the rest of her life. (She had never told me that.) As a result of this conversation she had been offered the position they had offered me earlier, and she had accepted it immediately.

When I heard this I felt hurt and angry, not with the company, but with my colleague. I had trusted her and I felt that she had betrayed my confidence and taken advantage of me. Moreover, she had intercepted my job. I told Laurie that I was happy for her but I didn't mean it. She wanted to go out to eat with me after work that day, but I declined. I didn't want to spend any more time with her.

An hour or so after Laurie had left my office, the senior officer came in and told me about his conversation with my friend. He said that he thought it was quite a coincidence that Laurie had expressed such great interest in developing publishing projects they had a job open in that area. I was immediately tempted to tell him the whole story, but I remained silent instead. After he left I tried to get back to work but what my friend had done ("behind my back" it seemed to me) kept coming back to my mind. I didn't accomplish very much at all.

On my way home that evening I took the subway as usual, and as usual, it was very crowded. People were pushing and shoving one another and fighting to get into the subway cars before the doors closed. Watching this happen at station after station made me think of how different the world would be if people treated one another better. Those around me seemed disgusted with life, and their faces showed just how discontented they were. I looked from person to person, thinking how sad it all was. Suddenly the lights in the train went off, and for a moment I could see my own reflection in the window in front of me. I was startled to see that I looked just like everyone else — tired, angry, fed up with life.

"If I did not have that peace inside how could I be a 'peacemaker'?"

The word of life we were living that month was : "Blessed are the peacemakers." As I thought it over in that moment, I realized why I felt the way I did. When I had heard Laurie's good news I had thought only of myself instead of rejoicing for her. The anger I felt towards her then had robbed me of peace inside and broken the peace between us. If I did not have that peace inside how could I be a "peacemaker?" In that moment I understood that peace is more important than hurt feelings, more important than a job, a misunderstanding. I decided to return to work the next day with a new attitude, an attitude of love.

The following morning I invited Laurie out to lunch to celebrate her new job. This small act of love on my part reestablished peace between us, and even though I didn't know what the future held for me I was no longer worried about it.

A few weeks later I was offered another position with the same company, one that offered me more job security and seemed better suited to my capabilities as well. I accepted that job with joy, feeling that it was really a gift from God.

R. M.

FAMILY LIFE

Weakened family life is one of the greatest social ills of our time.
The "New Family" Movement has as its aim to bring the Focolare spirit of unity into family life, so that each family will be deeply united within itself and with other families.

Who can take from us the joy of giving?

We were married in September 1971. At that time I was 32; my wife, Christianne, was 23.

We loved children and in July 1973 our first child, Andre, was born. We hoped for a large family but as time went on it seemed as though it would be impossible. Tests were taken and treatment which should have cured Christianne's hormonal imbalance proved ineffective. When the summer of 1976 arrived we were still a one-child family. Andre was growing up, lively, affectionate, maybe a little too much of an only child; and we celebrated his third birthday.

Then, in the space of a single day, it all changed. Andre went from the noisy little boy that he was to a lifeless body, dying from one of those diseases against which doctors are all too often powerless even today.

It happened the day after the Mariapolis at Angers (the summer meeting of the Focolare Movement), we went from the beauty of the Mariapolis to this intense suffering but somehow it marked the beginning of a period of deep unity between us. Andre's funeral was a "celebration." At the cemetery, remembering the songs that he liked to stumble through, we ourselves, as we stood by his little coffin, stumbled through "We love life and joy; who can take from us the joy of giving?"

But joy was not always present in the large house to which we moved only a couple of weeks after Andre's death: sometimes despair was stronger, but we entrusted ourselves to our little boy and slowly we let ourselves be led back to love, a love which triumphs.

Some of our friends were brave enough to ask us to look after their children who were about the same age as Andre. Each time they came, we felt the warmth, peace and joy that children bring. We saw that they were happy to come to us, and they often spoke of Andre — to them he was still so alive.

It wasn't long before we discovered that we were still very much "parents," so happy with the little ones, welcoming them, loving them, living with them. Our house, with its bedrooms upstairs, its large ground floor with the big French windows opening on to the garden was made for welcoming them. How could it stay empty? Little by little an idea grew stronger in us — why not adopt a baby?

At first the administrative difficulties seemed so great. Then we remembered a couple, we had met through mutual friends, and while we were on holidays at Christmas in 1976 we read an article telling of their experiences with adoption.

It seemed that they too had not been able to have a second child, and after a long wait had decided to adopt. At one point they were even ready to take on a fourth child and Emmanuelle was offered to them. The difference with Emmanuelle was that she had seriously been affected by polio. As she grew up with them they became more and more convinced that if God permitted people to abandon babies, he had certainly put, somewhere — in a home, in a family — enough love to welcome them.

If this was true for the healthy, it must be even more true for the sick and the handicapped; so somewhere there had to be a link — there had to be a place where the children and the potential parents could come together, a meeting place. They felt so strongly that God was asking them to be this link that the husband gave up his job as director of a factory and they devoted themselves fully to building up an association which specialized in the finding of homes for children normally thought to be unsuitable for adoption — the sick and the handicapped.

We contacted them, feeling instinctively that they would be of

A young French couple's experience of adopting a handicapped child.

help. A reply was a long while coming, they were so busy with their work in the association and with their own adopted children the latest of whom was Genevieve, a child with Down's syndrome.

Eventually we met in April, and we spent a long time at their home exchanging experiences. At the end of our time together we entrusted our future to God, putting ourselves at his disposal; we prayed for the children then ready for adoption, but without any prospective parents, and in particular we prayed for a little boy, seriously handicapped in all four limbs.

We left our friends, agreeing that the best thing would be for us to adopt a new born baby, not too seriously handicapped.

Three weeks later, John and Lucette wrote to us from the Adoption Society: "We don't want to trouble you or give you the feeling that we are trying to force your hand... we want to let you know that we now have almost completed our documentation of the little lad you prayed for, the one so handicapped in all four limbs... In his photographs we see a fine and very intelligent face. Reading the reports we were pleasantly surprised at all the interest he has created in the institution where he is waiting..."

This presented us with a big question mark. That very day we were going to Paris for a meeting of the New Humanity Movement[1] to offer our experience on how ones values in life could be based on the Scrptures.

Wasn't this what we were being asked to put into practice? To refuse... wasn't that cheating? Wouldn't it be to contradict all that we were saying?

We said a first, timid "Yes" — asking for more information. A complete report came detailing all the handicaps of our two-year-old boy. His two forearms, reduced in size to about a third, were without hands; one of his legs had a deformed foot, the other ended at the knee. We were in absolute confusion. The letter from John and Lucette ended: "You can almost certainly look forward to universal disapproval; both from friends and from the doctors you talk to about him. This is the way it is in a society which is too rational, weighing material inconvenience and sacrifice without balancing it against the precious happiness brought by such

a child and the certainty that, once and for all, you have opened your heart and your arms to the suffering Jesus present in him. Even in Christian cir-cles they are unable to understand. We watch and pray with you."

Deep down we knew that the answer was "Yes," but in a way we were going through the same experience his parents had lived through at his birth; discovering what had led them to entrust him to others from his very first day on earth. The difference was that we had time to make up our minds.

We consulted friends, pediatricians, orthopedic surgeons and psychologists, and we always received an understanding and serious welcome, though not always an encouraging one. John's forecast was coming true. A few, rare people understood. Why *not* this child? Why deny him the parents he needed so much? In the end we had to face the choice alone, with Jesus' words: "Whatever you do to the least of my brothers, you do to me."

At the beginning we had said yes to any child, not to a special child. Now he was here. We said "Yes" again, accepting him just as he was.

The adoption of a handicapped child isn't quick or easy. Parents who decide to adopt have to be screened with even greater care than others. There were talks with the social worker in charge of the inquiry. We also had long talks with Christianne's employer. We were sure that if it was God's will for us the plan would develop smoothly and it seemed important to us that we should have a completely open relationship with him so that he too could be fully involved. To our delight we were listened to with real interest and a desire to share in the plan. We learned too that Christianne would be able to receive full benefits from her health insurance program. In the meantime, the administration of the adoption proceeded very cautiously — it has to!

At the beginning of December we received formal approval of the adoption, and in mid-December we went to the home at Fontainbleau to meet the little child whom we knew only from photographs taken eight months before. When we arrived we found that everyone, from the doctors to the cleaning lady, was anxious for Billy to be adopted, and each one had done their part to prepare him. It was a marvelous moment: that little boy hurrying towards us with his little arms held out! He adopted us.

The young and the Gospel

At Christmas, Billy came to us for a first "stay." He was poor like the one in the manger; but, at the same time, rich in so many ways. He brought us his joy to be alive, his welcome for others, his boundless curiosity and his tenacious will that got him over so many obstacles.

Then two months of waiting. Two long months, both for us and for Billy. We made only one visit during this time and it left the bitter memory of a child who no longer believed that "Mommy and Daddy" would come back. "They'll come back soon," said the nurse on the Sunday morning. "It's not true," said Billy — but it was. The day arrived, February 11, 1978. In spite of snow and ice we went to pick up our son. He was ours! What a joy for the three of us, and also certainly for Andre! Our new child fit right away into our home. When another child comes over to our house it is he who welcomes them and invites them to play.

We learned as we watched him, asking ourselves why he behaved as he did. We watched as he suffered. Why did he cry for more than half-an-hour when we put him to bed? Why the temper? Slowly our little son calmed down. Going to bed became great fun, and a moment of peace. He was soon demanding our complete attention. We got on the floor to teach him to walk on his stumps. Every moment had to be given completely. Our own plans changed time and again.

Each day Billy asks us to love him as he is: he forces us to use all that we have; he is like a marvelous creative gift, helping us to develop our ability to love.

We are learning. Andre used to stumble as he sang: "Who can take from us the joy of giving?"

We stumble too, as we learn that same joy.

Yesterday my friend asked if my sister and I could visit her. I said yes, so after school my sister and I went to her house to bake cookies with her. Since we couldn't bake right away, we started to play.

When it was time to bake, we all went to the kitchen and began to get things started. Just then, my mother called and my sister and I had to go home. I was very disappointed, but to love my mother I went home.

Christina
12 years old

One day I wanted to watch a program on TV. My mother told me I had to make my bed. Since my brother had to do homework, I also had to make his bed. At first I complained that I would miss my program, but then I realized that it was more love to make beds. I got my hundredfold when my mother told me I could stop to watch the program and finish afterwards.

Joseph
11 years old

One day I was playing tennis. My mother said to turn on the water. I didn't want to because I was playing tennis, and I didn't want to be disturbed. But then I remembered this was my chance to love Jesus in her, so I turned on the water.

Maryrose
11 years old

One day, right before we were leaving for a gen meeting my mom asked me to go and dry the dishes. I really didn't want to because my hair was a mess and my dad was already telling us to get in the car. But I wanted to love Jesus in my mom so I dried the dishes. Then the hundredfold came for me because we didn't end up leaving until I was done.

Christie
11 years old

One day my mother felt really tired and she asked me to go and get the rug upstairs. I didn't want to and I said no. My mother was hurt when I said that and she went away. Then I remembered Jesus and his way of love. I wanted to love him in my mother. I went to her and said I'm sorry and got the rug for her.

Lorraine
9 years old

What is the Focolare Movement?

THE BEGINNINGS

The Focolare Movement began in 1943, in Italy. Chiara Lubich, with a small group of girls, realized in the midst of the total destruction of World War II, that God is the only one worth living for. Hence they began to place the Gospel in the center of their lives. The testament of Jesus became their Ideal: "That all may be one . . . that the world may know that you have sent me, and that you have loved them as you have loved me . . . " (Jn.17: 23). The life lived by these first girls, the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to a form of spirituality proper to the Focolare Movement. It represents a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life.

WHO ARE THE FOCOLARINI

The name "Focolarini" takes its origin from the Italian word "fire" and suggests the idea of "carriers of fire."

Single men and women live in separate communities called Focolare Centers. Their principal aim is to achieve unity among themselves through mutual charity practiced twenty-four hours a day. They follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. They work as other lay men and women in regular jobs and professions.

Some married persons, even though continuing to live in their families, participate fully in the life of either the men's or women's Focolare Centers in their common effort to achieve this same unity. They are called "Married Focolarini."

THE VOLUNTEERS

The Volunteers, who are also called the "Volunteers of God," would like to transform all human realities according to the Gospel spirit. For this reason they remain in their jobs and in their professions in order to vivify them with this spirit.

Their aim is to help form a society made of men and women who are made "new" by the Gospel message and who can then bring new life to all fields of human activity (education, business, etc.). This results in new social relationships which, in turn, lead to the realization of new structures of society.

THE LARGEST MEMBERSHIP

The largest membership of the Movement is made up of men, women, and young people of all social conditions who are free of any formal ties with it. Their bond of unity stems from their free and willing acceptance of its spirit. They keep in touch with the Movement and with one another through large or small gatherings, publications, correspondence, and personal contact.

People with other commitments, even those bound to religious institutions, can form part of the Movement too because the Movement exists wherever its spirit is lived. People of non-Christian religions are also counted among the Movement's friends. Also those who owe no allegiance to any faith are often attracted by one or another of the Movement's aspects.

GEN

The new generations of the Focolare Movement form another Movement or, better, three movements: the Gen 2, the Gen 3 and the Gen 4 Movements, divided according to their various age groups. "Gen" stands for new generation.

Thousands of young people all over the world have been attracted by the spirituality of unity. Their number continues to grow.

At the core of this large group of youth, are Gen who have committed themselves to living the Gospel message of love. The Gen use all possible means to share with other youth the conviction they have that the Gospel is the answer to every question and the motive for everything they do.

NEW! **DIARY OF FIRE**

DIARY OF FIRE

Igino Giordani was a person who lived life to the full and who enriched the lives of countless others. He was born in Tivoli, Italy, on September 24, 1894. From humble beginnings as a bricklayer's apprentice at the age of twelve, he rose to become one of Italy's foremost twentieth-century writers.

In the mid 1920's, while in New York studying at Columbia University, Giordani, a Catholic, had his first significant contacts with representatives of various other Christian traditions and immediately recognized the necessity of creating an ecumenical consciousness among Catholics and of fostering mutual understanding among Christians. To this end he worked untiringly for the next fifty-five years.

During World War II, when *Diary of Fire* begins, Giordani was actively engaged with his close friend DeGasperi and other anti-Fascist leaders in formulating plans for a new and just political order for postwar Italy. After the war he was elected to the Italian parliament.

In 1948, Giordani met the Focolare Movement and was struck by the witness of unity he saw among its members. It seemed to him that the Focolare had a gift for bringing about unity, which included healing the separation between the lay and religious vocations. Indeed, soon he became the first married person to consecrate himself to God in this new lay movement.

The remaining thirty years of his life were tirelessly dedicated to the Focolare Movement: as editor of its magazine, *Città Nuova*; director of its ecumenical center, Centro Uno; one of the directors of its international institute of spiritual formation. He also authored many books and articles that embody the Focolare spirituality.

In the spring of 1980, at the age of eighty-five, Igino Giordani left this life.

Diary of Fire is the personal record of his life, of his own spiritual "adventure." Through this diary we are afforded the opportunity of sharing the spiritual journey of one whom Chiara Lubich, the foundress of the Focolare Movement, described as a "great soul, always open to humanity," and whom Pope John XXIII called a "shining light."

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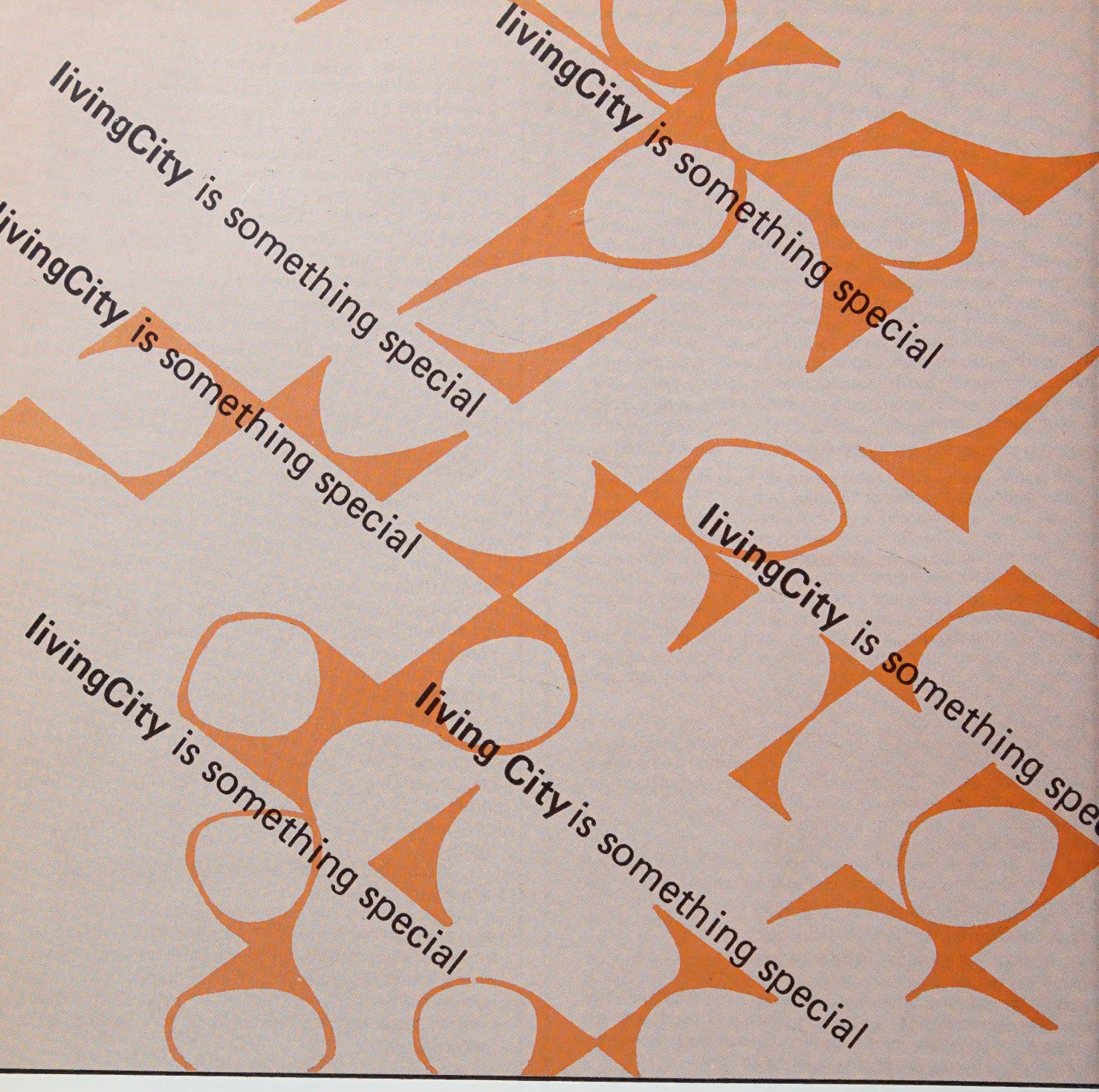
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